International Relations 466:

Contemporary Issues in Latin American Politics

Spring 2015

When: M & W 3:30-4:50 p.m.  Professor Gerardo Munck
Where: VKC 209     E-Mail: munck@usc.edu
Office Hours: M 2:00-3:20 p.m. or by appointment
Office: VKC 326A

1. Course Description
The course focuses on current politics in Latin America. We will first consider the background to current politics in the region, recent electoral trends and the new regional democratic agenda. Then we will sequentially address a range of themes: electoral democracy; the political inclusion of women, afro-descendants and indigenous peoples; human rights, violence, and drugs; and economic inequality and poverty. The discussion will touch on most of the countries in Latin America and we will analyze current issues and trends, and also consider possible responses to the problems we identify.

2. Requirements
The basic requirements include six quizzes (20% of the overall grade), a 15-page research paper (20%), an in-class mid-term (30%), and an in-class final exam (30%). Class participation is also an essential part of the course.

With regard to the quizzes, I have included provisional dates in the syllabus, but these may change slightly. The exact dates will be announced in class. Of the six quizzes, I will drop the lowest one and thus compute grades on the basis of your best five quizzes.

With regard to your research papers, you are supposed to define your own topic of study. The only requirement concerning topic selection is that it must be related to the issues discussed in the course and that it must be based largely on scholarly literature, that is, academic books, articles in professional journals, etc. A brief description of your topic, on a sheet of paper or by email, is due on March 25. The completed paper is due the last day of class (April 29).

3. Readings
All the readings are accessible through the Blackboard, under “Readings.” Some of the electronic files include sections that do not need to be read. The specific page numbers you need to read are clearly indicated below.
Course Outline, Readings and Assignments

Meeting 1 (1/12): Introduction

1. Background, the Current Political Scenario, and the New Democracy Agenda

Meetings 2, 3 & 4 (1/14, 1/21, 1/26): Background: Transitions to Democracy and Neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s


*** Martin Luther King’s Birthday: No class on Monday, January 19 ***

Reid, Michael, Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America’s Soul (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2007). Read only pp. 118-20 (the section on “The rise and indebted fall of statist protectionism”) and pp. 132-47 (the sections on “A paradigm shift,” “Debt and the battle for stability,” “Tearing down barriers” and “Public vices, private passions”).

-Quiz # 1 (1/28)

Meetings 5, 6, 7 & 8 (1/28, 2/2, 2/4, 2/9): The Current Political Scenario: Who Governs? What do the Governors Stand For?

Torreon, Barbara Salazar, Latin America and the Caribbean: Fact Sheet on Leaders and Elections, May 12, 2014. 3 pgs.


Navia, Patricio and Ignacio Walker, “Political Institutions, Populism, and Democracy in Latin America,” pp 245-65, in Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully (eds.), Democratic Governance in Latin America (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). Read only pp. 256-63 (the sections on “The neoliberal economic reforms of the nineties and their outcome” and “Populist and non-populist responses”, and pay attention to Figure 7.1 on p. 262).


-Quiz # 2 (2/9)
Meeting 9 (2/11): The New Hemispheric Agenda to Promote and Defend Democracy: The OAS and Inter-American Democratic Charter


OAS, Inter-American Democratic Charter. (Adopted by the General Assembly at its special session held in Lima, Peru, on September 11, 2001). 20 pgs.


*** Presidents’ Day: No class on Monday, February 16 ***

2. Political Rights I: Electoral Democracy

Meetings 10 & 11 (2/18, 2/23): Electing Representatives


-Quiz # 3 (2/23)

Meetings 12, 13, 14 & 15 (2/25, 3/2, 3/4, 3/9): Completing Electoral Terms


OAS AG/RES. 1080 (XXI-O/91) on Representative Democracy. (Resolution adopted at the fifth plenary session, held on June 5, 1991). 1 pg.

OAS, Inter-American Democratic Charter. (Adopted by the General Assembly at its special session held in Lima, Peru, on September 11, 2001). Reread Ch. 4.


-Quiz # 4 (3/9)

Meeting 16 (3/11). Mid-Term

*** In-Class Mid-Term Exam: March 11 ***

*** Spring Break: March 16-20 ***

3. Political Rights II: Political Inclusion

Meetings 17 & 18 (3/23, 3/25): Questions of Gender, Ethnicity and Race


4. Civil Rights

Meetings 19, 20 & 21 (3/30, 4/1, 4/6): Confronting the Past: Transitional Justice


-Quiz # 5 (4/6)


OAS, The Drug Problem in the Americas  (Washington, D.C.: General Secretariat of the OAS, 2013). 104 pgs. (This paper has a lot of empty pages and tables).


Meetings 25 (4/20): The Inter-American Human Rights System


-Quiz # 6 (4/22)

5. Social Rights

Meeting 26 (4/22): Revisiting Neoliberalism and the Problem of Inequality

Reid, Michael, Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America’s Soul (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2007), Ch. 6 (pp. 124-58) on “The Rise and Fall of the Washington Consensus,” Read only pages 124-132, skip pp. 132-47, and resume reading on page 147 (the section on “A balance sheet of the reforms”).

World Bank, Shifting Gears to Accelerate Shared Prosperity in Latin America and the Caribbean, (Washington, DC. World Bank, June 2013). 28 pgs.


Meeting 27 (4/27): Poverty and Social Policy


6. Conclusions

Meeting 28 (4/29): A Recapitulation


*** Final Exam: Monday, May 8, 2:00-4:00 p.m. (same classroom) ***